



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3005

December 14, 2021

Dear Superintendent:

Thank you for your commitment to providing students with a quality education and opportunities for learning and growth in our outstanding Fifth District schools. As you know, many of our students rely on school breakfasts and lunches, including the more than five hundred thousand students in New Jersey who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Countless studies have shown that children who don't start with breakfast are at a massive disadvantage for succeeding in school.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. This program provides nutritionally balanced, low or no-cost lunches to children each school day.

As you know, school districts in New Jersey are required to participate in the NSLP or offer a lunch program that meets U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards if 5 percent or more of their students meet the eligibility requirements. If 20 percent or more of the students are eligible for free lunch, a district must also participate in the free School Breakfast Program. Public school districts with fewer than 5 percent of students eligible are not required to participate in these programs.

In April, the USDA announced that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, they would extend universal free lunch programs through the NSLP for all students through June 2022, regardless of income level. Additionally, New Jersey began distributing \$375 per child in extended Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) benefits in September, *which families can only access if their school participates in the NSLP*. As you can see, it is extremely important that school districts participate to maximize resources for the families they serve.

Schools that opted out of the program this year or last are now losing federal investments for expanded access to free school lunches for all students — not only those from low-income families. Additionally, the USDA has extended its Seamless Summer Option (SSO) through the 2021-2022 school year. This program allows schools to receive full federal reimbursement for all meals served; in other words, our local community will not have to pay one cent for this program.

Schools that choose to utilize these programs will receive higher-than-normal meal reimbursements for every meal they serve, which will allow them to serve nutritious meals while

managing increased costs associated with pandemic-related operational and supply chain challenges.

Here's my message to all school districts who aren't feeding children who qualify for these programs: We cannot let a single child go hungry. When the result would be hundreds more students starting their day with a sharper mind, stronger body, and better chance of a successful school day, the excuse that providing these meals is too bureaucratically burdensome just doesn't add up.

As a strong proponent of clawing back federal funds to our communities, especially so that we can get resources to actual families in need, I believe that school districts must take advantage of these programs and avoid leaving federal tax dollars that New Jersey residents have already paid on the table.

As the school year continues, I would like to know your plans to address the following:

- Is your school district currently participating in either the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, or both?
- If your school district has chosen to opt-out of the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast program, please explain your reasoning for this decision and how you plan to continue to meet the nutritional needs of your students?

It is important for me to know how you are utilizing these federal investments for our students and families. For districts who chose to opt out of these programs, I plan to communicate directly with families in communities to ensure our schools are providing meals to children in need.

Please update me via letter or email (Josh.Gottheimer@mail.house.gov) by December 31, 2021, so that we can ensure that there are resources to feed our children and set them up for success. I appreciate your dedication to the well-being of students, educators, and the North Jersey community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Gottheimer". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "J" and "G".

Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS